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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [ENRG](#) [ASEC](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: COMORANS PROTEST ACUTE FUEL SHORTAGE

REF: ANTAN 479

¶1. (U) Hundreds of Comorans took to the streets of Moroni this week to protest acute fuel shortages. The demonstrators, many of them taxi drivers, remained peaceful and carried banners critical of President Sambi.

¶2. (SBU) EmbOfs (who visited the Comoros July 23-30) found fuel virtually unavailable in Moroni, with their rental car having only a quarter tank for a week-long visit. There is virtually no fuel remaining in the Comoros; dwindling stocks of gas and diesel are held at the Port of Moroni or traded on the black market. Electricity, already a chronic problem in the Comoros, is available only two or three hours in 24. Public water is limited to when the power is on. The Port operator told EmbOfs his emergency stock is almost gone - when he runs out in the next week, he will have to suspend Port operations. Given Comoros imports everything, the impact will be immediate. The operator has also provided some fuel to the main hospital in Moroni.

¶3. (SBU) The Port operator said rumors about a tanker en route to the Comoros from Tanzania are false. He said no purchase contract has been signed; after which at least four more days will be required for the shipment. Protestors blame Sambi for cancelling the fuel contract with the French oil giant TOTAL before putting in place a new arrangement (REFTEL).

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT. Lack of fuel and spiking food prices are a dangerous mix and Sambi's government has certainly earned the criticism for having abandoned an imperfect arrangement before putting in place a better one. The reports that no relief is imminent are worrisome because they raise the specter that peaceful protest could boil into a serious public security at some point in the future. ENS COMMENT.

SIBLEY